

SILVERBIRDS

OBJECTIVES:

- Identify elements of pop art that are particular to American Culture and that appear specifically in Rosenquist's work
- Understand how pop art borrows from mass-produced images and products and comments on the impact of the age of electronic communications
- Recognize how pop art uses the repetition of identical units that can often be found in the world of science and math

OUTCOMES—SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS:

- Geography and Spatial Sense
- Listening, Viewing, and Speaking; Language
- Nature of Science
- Visual Arts - skills and techniques; cultural and historical connections; aesthetic and critical analysis; applications to life
- Time, Continuity, and Change

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

POP ART

Great Britain and U.S., 1950s

Pop art was pioneered in London in the mid-1950s by Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi (members of the Independent Group), and in the 1960s by Peter Blake, Patrick Caulfield, David Hockney, Allen Jones, and Peter Phillips. In the early 1960s Pop art took off in the U.S., exemplified by the work of Jim Dine, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Mel Ramos, **James Rosenquist**, Ed Ruscha, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann.

With its roots in Dada(a return to natural and unreasonable order)—and the immediate precedent of Jasper Johns's Neo-Dada (inclusion in art of ordinary reality) adaptations of such things as beer cans and the American flag—Pop art explored the image world of popular culture, from which its name derives. Basing their techniques, style, and imagery on certain aspects of mass reproduction, the media, and consumer society, these artists took inspiration from advertising, pulp magazines, billboards, movies, television, comic strips, and shop windows. These images, presented with (and sometimes transformed by) humor, wit, and irony, can be seen as both a celebration and a critique of popular culture. In the early 1960s German artists Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter explored a Pop-related style, which they called Capitalist Realism. <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/>

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

<http://www.florida-arts.org/programs/halloffame/rosenquist.htm>

Considered one of the preeminent artists of the Pop Art Movement, James Rosenquist redefined art during the second half of the twentieth century. He began his career as a commercial sign painter, painting large-scale billboards in the Mid-west and New York. Using his commercial billboard painting skills and taking imagery from popular culture, he then transformed the way painting was viewed. Rosenquist attended the renowned Art Students League and for over thirty years, has maintained a relationship with New

York City's prestigious Leo Castelli Gallery, where his now famous wraparound painting, F-111 was first exhibited in 1965.

Currently residing in Aripeka, Rosenquist has been a Florida resident for over 25 years. His work has been featured in 17 solo exhibitions in major Florida museums and galleries. He was named a State of Florida Ambassador of the Arts and, in 1991, he received the Florida Prize, awarded by the New York Times Regional Newspapers. In 1978, he was commissioned by the Florida government to create large murals in the State Capitol Building.

<http://www.fi.muni.cz/~toms/PopArt/contents.html>

Born in 1933 at Grand Forks, North Dakota. His family moved to Minneapolis in 1944. In 1948 he began his studies of art at the Minneapolis Art Institute. In 1953 he continued his studies of painting at the University of Minnesota. In 1955 he had a scholarship to go to the Art Students' League, New York, where he met Robert Indiana. During this period he painted small format abstract paintings and worked part-time as a driver. In 1957 he met Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. In 1959 he was at the same drawing class as Claes Oldenburg and was made "head painter" by the Artcraft Strauss Corporation. He married the textile designer Mary Lou Adams. During the election he produced the picture *President Elect* in which John F. Kennedy's face is combined in a kind of collage with sex and automobile imagery.

His first one-man exhibition in the Green Gallery, in 1962, was sold out. In 1963 he worked on several sculptures, had a number of exhibitions at the *Galerie Ileana Sonnabend*, showed his work at the Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, and taught at Yale University. In 1965 he began to work with lithographs. In the same year he made the 26 meter-wide picture *F-111*, which was shown at the Jewish Museum, New York, at *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm, and in other European cities. It is one of his most important works. The spatial organization of the composition into layers suggests the interrelationship of contemporary historical symbols and signs of affluence and military hardware, a vision of American culture expressing the proximity of euphoria and catastrophe.

In 1967 he moved to East Hampton. In 1968 he was given his first retrospective by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. In 1969 he turned his attention to experimenting with film techniques. In 1970 he went to Cologne for the opening of his exhibition at the Galerie Rolf Ricke. During the public protest against the Vietnam War he was briefly detained in Washington. During the same year he had comprehensive retrospectives at the Wallraf-Richards Museum, Cologne, and the Whitney Museum, New York. In 1974 and 1975 he lobbied the senate on the legal rights of artists. He became separated from his wife and designed his own house with an open-air studio at Indian Bay, Aripeka, Florida.

In 1978 *F-111* was exhibited in the International Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In his work of the late seventies and eighties, e.g. *4 New Clear Women*, images of women are confronted with machine aesthetics, usually in large oblong compositions. The themes of these dynamic compositions also include fire, progress and war machinery which he shows in rotating pictorial narratives. Between 1985 and 1987 Rosenquist's entire

development as an artist was shown in a comprehensive retrospective at six American museums.

<http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/>

James Rosenquist
American, born 1933

Jim Rosenquist had an itinerant childhood. An only child he moved with his family frequently throughout the Midwest. His parents shared with him their interest in airplanes and things mechanical. In junior high school Rosenquist took art classes, and he later won a scholarship to attend Saturday classes at the Minneapolis School of Art. After high school he enrolled in the University of Minnesota's art program, studying with Cameron Booth. During the summer he worked for a contractor in Iowa, Wisconsin, and North Dakota, painting signs and bulk storage tanks.

In 1954 Rosenquist painted his first billboard for General Outdoor Advertising in Minneapolis. A year later, on scholarship to the Art Students League in New York, Rosenquist studied with Edwin Dickinson, Will Barnet, Morris Kantor, George Grosz, and Vaclav Vytlacil.

In 1957 Rosenquist joined the sign painters union and in 1958 went to work for ArtKraft Strauss Company painting billboards. He also worked on window displays for Bonwit Teller and Tiffany and Company.

By 1960 Rosenquist had set aside enough of his commercial earnings to allow him to spend a year painting in his studio. He moved to Coenties Slip, where he shared a loft with Charles Hinman. Rosenquist had tentatively explored the use of commercial methods and materials in his studio work of the late 1950s but after his move to the Slip, he left behind both the abstract expressionist and figurative modes he had employed in his early work and developed the montage like arrangement of deliberately fragmented images from popular culture--inconsistently scaled and enigmatically juxtaposed--that characterized the monumental paintings of his mature style.

Rosenquist had his first one-man exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York in 1962, and every painting was sold. In 1963 he completed a mural for the New York World's Fair, and Art in America selected him as "Young Talent Painter" of the year. Two years later the artist finished painting the monumental, highly publicized F-111, which toured Europe during the 1960s and has been considered an important expression of the anti-Vietnam War movement. During the 1970s he became active in issues of artists' rights legislation. In 1976 Rosenquist built his house and studio in Aripeka, Florida.

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INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE/DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

1. Rosenquist once said, "Living in the Plains, you'd see surreal things; you'd see mirages. I'm sitting on the front porch, as a little kid at sunset, and the sun is in back of me, and walking across the horizon is a Trojan horse four stories tall. I go, 'Uh oh--what's that?' So I run into the house and say, 'Look! Look at the big horse!' It was the neighbor's white stallion, which had got loose, caught the light in the heat, and it looked four stories tall."

These kinds of little things make, I think, the curiosity, or the inquisitiveness, that make an artist.”

- Discuss how this statement relates to Rosenquist’s work in general and to *Silverbirds* specifically.
 - Discuss what kind of environment creates mirages. Students can learn how mirages happen naturally and how they may occur based on man-made changes in the environment.
 - Discuss the importance of curiosity or inquisitiveness for today’s society. Discuss those qualities in relation to complacency, the antithesis of curiosity and inquisitiveness.
2. Discuss the mathematical and cultural significance of tessellations and let students practice making their own. Relate the process of tessellations to Rosenquist’s work. Discuss the history of number symbolism to the various cultures around the world and relate this history to the significance of geometry and/or geometric principles.
 3. Discuss the various elements of *Silverbirds*; the layers of images—woman’s face, guerilla’s head and face; aperture shape; tessellation; number sets; and text—and their significance to American culture in the 1980s. What kind of statement do you think is being made? How does the message change when the image is compared to American culture today (2005)?

ACTIVITIES/PROJECTS

- Choose any non-Western culture; after having discussed all aspects of that culture (religion, technology, daily life, industry, landscape, etc.) have students create a work of art that describes those aspects using only fragments of images found through previously printed media. Students should write an artist statement explaining the work and then display the images together as an exhibition.
- James Rosenquist was showing what American culture was like in the 1970s-80s in *Silverbirds*. Have students create a similar, personal commentary work that reflects American society in the 21st century (2005). Students can create a visual work as well as a written work.
- Assign a book or poem popular during the decades of the 60s, 70s, or 80s. Have students discuss the work and write a critical review. Relate this work and the students’ review to Rosenquist’s work.
- Have students choose a very small object and draw it on a large scale using a mathematical grid to increase its size. Then have them do the opposite choose a very large object and draw it on a small scale using the same techniques. Combine the two objects in one composition and use elements of text to create a unifying statement on the work.

<http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Rosenquist.html>

- Have students create a visual political commentary on American culture and society today by using elements of technology and media. They can use found objects such as discarded computer cards or images of the objects found in printed material.

REFERENCES

<http://www.math.dartmouth.edu>

<http://www.jimrosenquist-artist.com/>

Hunter, Sam and John Jacobus. *Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. Third Edition. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc. and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992.

Kurtz, Bruce D. *Contemporary Art 1965-1990*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1992.

RESOURCES

<http://www.jimrosenquist-artist.com/>

<http://www.jimrosenquist-artist.com>

<http://www.castelligallery.com>

<http://www.usfcam.usf.edu/PublicArt/PubArt.html>

<http://www.graphicstudio.usf.edu>